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Governor
Demesia Padilla, CPA
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9th Judicial District
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District Attorney

AUTHORITIES BUST SOPHISTICATED NEW MEXICO DRIVER'S LICENSE FRAUD RING

In One of the Largest Driver's License Schemes Uncovered to Date, Dozens of NM Licenses Were Fraudulently Provided to Foreign Nationals From Mexico, El Salvador, Brazil, Guatemala, Uruguay and Honduras, Now Living in Georgia, Florida, South Carolina, Illinois

ALBUQUERQUE – An illegal foreign national from Mexico and his family are accused of running a \$30,000 per month operation that includes human traffickers, mail collectors, and a public notary signing false affidavits to illegally obtain New Mexico driver's licenses for foreign nationals from Mexico, El Salvador, Brazil, Guatemala, Uruguay and Honduras who are now suspected of living in Georgia, Florida, South Carolina and Illinois.

Luis Raul Collazo-Medrano and eight other accomplices, including his wife and daughter, have been charged with conspiracy, forgery and other felony charges for fraudulently setting up residential addresses in Clovis and Portales and falsifying other documents to obtain New Mexico driver's licenses for foreign nationals living outside the state. Although investigators identified 54 cases for prosecution purposes, the ring is accused of fraudulently obtaining hundreds of New Mexico driver's licenses for illegal foreign nationals living outside the State.

The charges were announced by Ninth Judicial District Attorney Matthew Chandler and New Mexico Taxation and Revenue Department (TRD) Secretary Demesia Padilla at a joint press conference earlier today. Investigators from the Ninth Judicial District and the Tax Fraud Investigation Division within TRD worked together to uncover the fraud ring.

"The arrest affidavits filed this week follow a complex, eight-month investigation that has included the assistance from multiple different law enforcement agencies," District Attorney Chandler said. "Our focus now moves to locating and apprehending the defendants that are

allegedly involved in this crime ring and provide each of them with their day in court.”

“This is one of the largest and most sophisticated driver’s license fraud rings we have uncovered,” said Secretary Padilla. “The scheme has been in operation for more than two years, and it’s clear that the ring leaders adjusted their tactics each time enforcement measures or foreign national license regulations changed. This proves that no matter how good we get at catching these schemes, criminals are finding new ways to game our system. Unless we stop this practice, New Mexico will continue to be a driver’s license shopping center for people across the country and around the world who have no business holding a government-issued document intended only for residents of our state.”

According to the attached criminal complaint, Collazo-Medrano fraudulently used eight different addresses – four in Clovis and four in Portales – to establish residential requirements for dozens of foreign nationals between October 2009 and December 2011. Investigators have been able to establish 54 fraud cases involving Collazo-Medrano, so far, as their investigation continues.

Collazo-Medrano rented some of these homes and allowed his accomplices to live for free in exchange for collecting mail, including driver’s licenses mailed to those addresses from the Motor Vehicle Division.

Collazo-Medrano’s wife, Olivia Campos, and daughter, Viridiana Campos, helped him with collecting mail from different addresses, mailing driver’s licenses to foreign nationals living in other states, setting appointments with MVD offices, and preparing fraudulent documents.

The criminal complaint also implicates Veronica Diaz, AKA Veronica Lara, a public notary from Portales, for signing false affidavits notarizing rental agreements and other documents. Diaz is also accused of not maintaining her notary log book as required by the law and buying vehicle titles to establish residency for foreign nationals.

Diaz also told investigators that before the state implemented an appointment process in the summer of 2010 for foreign nationals to obtain New Mexico driver’s licenses, Collazo-Medrano would bring in van loads of foreign nationals to Clovis and Portales for their driver’s licenses. She admitted that her living room would, at times, be full of foreign nationals waiting for her to sign their affidavits. Eleven foreign nationals used Diaz’s residential address as their own, but none live there.

In fact, of the foreign nationals who obtained their driver’s licenses in connection with this fraud ring, the whereabouts of each license holder remains completely unknown, though it is clear that they do not reside at the Clovis or Portales addresses provided to MVD in order to get their license. MVD is in the process of revoking licenses issued to these individuals.

Collazo-Medrano also recruited Veronica Rivera of Portales and Maria Rivas of Portales and Midland, Texas, to transport his clients to different MVD offices, including taking them for driving tests. Both women also told investigators that they picked up Collazo-Medrano’s clients from Amarillo airport in Texas and drove them to Clovis and Portales for \$100 per customer, plus gas. Rivera is also accused of forging documents for foreign nationals. Rivas also told investigators that Collazo-Medrano gave her \$500 to buy 10 car titles from a salvage yard to be used for establishing residential requirements for foreign nationals.

Collazo-Medrano also persuaded Brenda Vicuna of Portales to stay in at least two of his rental homes for free in exchange for having the lease agreement on her name and collecting mail and paying his utility bills.

Also charged in this scheme are two foreign nationals living in Portales – Luis Tirado and Esteban Lopez-Mendieta – who forged residential affidavits for three other foreign nationals so they could obtain their driver's licenses.

The joint investigation conducted by TFID and the Ninth Judicial District Attorney's Office started last November after several foreign nationals were found to be using the same phone numbers in Roosevelt County to make appointments with MVD.

Investigators also discovered several foreign nationals used the same addresses as their place of residence in Clovis and Portales, but none of them lived there.

Investigators unearthed the scam when a Brazilian national living in Georgia approached MVD to inquire about the status of her driver's license. This individual had paid \$2,000 to Collazo-Medrano to bring her to New Mexico. She flew into Amarillo, Texas, where she was picked up by Collazo-Medrano and Veronica Rivera and driven to Portales. Collazo-Medrano then charged her an additional \$2,000 for residential and other documents, and was assisted by Veronica Diaz in preparing her paperwork for the driver's license.

However, MVD stopped the issuance of the driver's license for this Brazilian national from Georgia because of potential fraud, as several other foreign nationals had also been using the same residential address in Portales. The woman told investigators that she demanded her money back from Collazo-Medrano, who reportedly told her he didn't "need her money," as he was "making \$30,000 a month assisting other foreign nationals" in fraudulently obtaining New Mexico driver's licenses.

To date Maria Rivas and Veronica Rivera have been arrested and booked into the Roosevelt County Jail on \$10,000 cash only bonds.

Jose Luis Tirado and Esteban Lopez-Mendieta are known to law enforcement officials to be illegal foreign nationals from Mexico and their current whereabouts are still under investigation.

Vernonica Diaz is currently in the El Paso area and Brenda Vicuna is in Lubbock, Texas. Law enforcement officials are currently working with both for a self-surrender.

The ring leader (Collazo-Medrano), along with his wife and daughter, remain at-large. Law enforcement agencies are working in conjunction with the United States Marshal's Office, Texas law enforcement and Alabama law enforcement officers to locate them. All active warrants have been entered into a national database.

If anyone sees these individuals or has information about where they may be hiding, they should immediately call the Ninth Judicial District Attorney's Office at (575) 769-2246 or any law enforcement agency.

A diagram with photos of those involved in this foreign national driver's license scheme is attached to this release.

Following are the charges filed against the nine suspects:

- **Luis Raul Collazo-Medrano, 52, of Texas:** 37 counts of conspiracy to commit altered, forged or fictitious license and two counts of contributing to delinquency of minor.
- **Veronica Diaz (AKA Veronica Lara), 37, of Portales:** 12 counts of forgery; 22 counts of conspiracy to commit altered, forged or fictitious license; and three counts of false evidence title and registration.
- **Veronica Rivera (AKA Veronica Vicuna), 24, of Portales:** 23 counts of conspiracy to commit altered, forged or fictitious license.
- **Brenda Vicuna, 20, of Portales:** Two counts of conspiracy to commit altered, forged or fictitious license.
- **Olivia Campos, 49, of Texas:** 31 counts of conspiracy to commit altered, forged or fictitious license.
- **Viridiana Campos, 24, of Texas:** 10 counts of conspiracy to commit altered, forged or fictitious license.
- **Luis Tirado, 33, of Portales:** Three counts of conspiracy to commit altered, forged or fictitious license.
- **Esteban Lopez-Mendieta, 30, of Portales:** Three counts of conspiracy to commit altered, forged or fictitious license.
- **Maria Rivas, 41, of Portales and Midland, Texas:** Five counts of conspiracy to commit altered, forged or fictitious license, and three counts of false evidence title and registration.

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